

MEMORIES OF PRINCIPAL FAIRBAIRN.

THE Editor requests me to write for this magazine some account of Dr. Fairbairn. I can only describe the relations which I had with the late Principal, as I am quite incompetent to estimate his theological and philosophical work or weigh his character as a whole.

In a sense I became interested in the man long before I knew him personally. Like many other students or young graduates of Aberdeen, I was keenly interested in his candidature for the Professorship of Moral Philosophy, which occurred while I was an undergraduate at Oxford: I cannot remember the precise year. He was rejected, and another candidate, the admirable librarian of the University, was appointed. The successful candidate was a man of great personal excellence, about whom it was said that there was only one stain on his otherwise blameless life, viz., that he had aspired to be a Professor of Moral Philosophy. He was deservedly most popular with the students in his class, for whom he did everything possible except teach them philosophy, which was a subject as completely outside of him as the higher mathematics; and their affection for him perpetuated itself in a memorial which they raised to his memory after his death.

As a Professor, Dr. Fairbairn would not have been anything like so popular with the mass of students as his successful competitor. In the case of a Professor in a Scottish University, general popularity has not much relation to eminent ability or knowledge,—these win respect, but popularity is due to certain other virtues, and Fairbairn had not the qualities which would have won the love of boys fresh from school. It would have been different with more mature students, of whom a larger proportion would have

appreciated his power; and for several students in every year Fairbairn would have been, the one leading Professor of the University—even in a University where Bain, a man of immense ability, but rather of the scientific than the philosophic order of mind, was also Professor—but probably for one or two only.

In the counsels of the University, however, Dr. Fairbairn would have been a guiding and dominant spirit. His powers of work, his insight into the character of men, his far-seeing views of the future of education, his high ideal of what a University ought to be, his wide range of knowledge, his real sympathy with literature and human thought in its highest manifestations, and finally his indomitable perseverance and unflinching resolution, would have made him a power in the University and in all the Scottish Universities; but therein lay the secret of the opposition to him. They who feared his coming power opposed him, while they spoke fair promises to him.

I have often thought how unfortunate it was for the Scottish Universities, as homes of literary and philosophic study, that McCosh and Fairbairn were both rejected in Aberdeen for local candidates. Bain, who was preferred to McCosh, was an abler man than his rival in many respects; but a certain coldness and hardness and insensibility to the spiritual side of literature and philosophy restricted his influence and stunted his nature; and, if he had dominated the reform of the Universities, he would have made them as narrow on one side as they had been previously on another side. Fairbairn, with higher ability and wider reading and broader sympathy than McCosh, was exactly the man that was needed at that critical period, when the Scottish Universities were going to be remodelled. He would have held the balance true. He would have fostered literature with all his heart, and science with all his judg-

ment and common sense. He would have commanded the confidence of the Universities and of almost every section of the public. In his place was selected a lovable, kindly, well-meaning person, not well read, untrained in all the high ways and aims of learning, and a nonentity in the counsels of his own and every other University.

No blow so fatal to the higher development and the influence of the Scottish Universities has been struck in my time as the rejection of Fairbairn. To himself, however, the loss was, in a sense, nothing. He had a career before him, which some may (perhaps rightly) consider a greater and a nobler one. He was not a man to be kept down in spirits, or to be retarded in his career, by any reverse, small or great. What we lost in the Scottish Universities was the gain of English theological teaching.

It was years later before I saw Dr. Fairbairn personally. If I remember rightly, he came to Oxford when Mansfield College was planned, but not yet built; and, mindful of old Aberdeen incidents, I called upon him. Later he invited my wife and myself to be present at the inauguration of the finished buildings of Mansfield; and there we heard Dr. Dale preach in the College chapel.

These two meetings were the beginning of much pleasant intercourse, from which I learned much and profited much. Some articles which the Editor of the *EXPOSITOR* wrung from me by persistent requests, repeated year after year, and which appeared in this magazine in the winter of 1888-9, attracted the attention of the Principal of Mansfield College; and the College invited me to give a course of six lectures on the position of the Christian Church in the Roman Empire. This brought me into closer relations with him; and he continued his friendly intercourse, his kindly counsel and his ever ready help for the remainder of his life. The measure of his friendship and his indulgent

opinion of my work is indicated by the three sets of lectures which I was invited by the College authorities to give at Mansfield (all published and bearing the name of the College).¹ I have, therefore, the right to speak as one honoured with his confidence and as deeply indebted to him.

I knew Dr. Fairbairn only in the maturity of his powers ; and of set purpose I avoided seeing him in his decline. I was not called to do so by any duty, and I preferred to keep the memory of him at his best, and to let no feeling of mere sympathy or pity for the man after he was past his full strength, mingle with my admiration for his great achievements and endowments.

He was called to perform a difficult and delicate task in Oxford ; and he did it with great tact and complete success. He conducted the first experiment in setting down a College (intended professedly and exclusively for theology outside the Church of England) within the pale of a University so thoroughly steeped in the Anglican tradition as Oxford had been by many centuries of history and connexion. The success of the College justified the insight and forethought of those who resolved to make this experiment, bold as it seemed in the beginning ; and among those men Fairbairn was prominent—possibly a leader, but as to that others can speak, for I have not the knowledge. That success also furnished the best possible proof of the judgment and good sense with which the College was managed by its Council. Above all it proved the high quality of the first Principal. His great stores of learning and his readiness of expression made him an important figure in every social gathering of the learned. He was able to be all things to all highly educated men. He had read all

¹ *The Church in the Roman Empire: St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen* (this is honoured also with the name of Auburn Seminary, New York): *The Cities of St. Paul* (Dale Lectures).

that each of them thought most worth reading, and he spoke of it with the ease of one who had assimilated it and could estimate it from a point of vantage.

Finally, and not least, the success of the College justified the University of Oxford; and proved that it was ready to accept the best from every source and every side, that it could remain true to all that was best in its old tradition and history, and yet adapt itself to the new conditions, and welcome the new men and enrich itself for the future. The struggle between darkness and light, between ignorance and knowledge, between evil and good, must always continue, for the knowledge of one generation becomes the ignorance of the next, if the next generation is satisfied merely to hold and to pass on that inherited knowledge without development or addition. The insensible growth of the Universities through improved method, and the better using of the existing conditions, and the increasing freedom of spirit with the strength that springs therefrom, are more important in their history than so-called "University Reform," which is dependent on the enactment of regular laws and statutes, obtained after long struggles and contest about words and often disappointing the hopes of one side as much as they belie the fears of the other. Fairbairn had his difficulties to meet during the following years, and they were not few or small; but he was accepted on his merits; he was invited to put his name on the books of Exeter College and the University offered him the degree of M.A., a much rarer and far more gratifying distinction than an Honorary Doctorate, for it made him a full member of the University with all the privileges of the regular graduate, and the opportunity, if he chose, of taking part in the constantly debated schemes of University Reform as well as in the general business of the University.

Since then the example of Mansfield has been followed

by other bodies, in Cambridge as well as in Oxford ; and these new Colleges have strengthened the study of Theology in both Universities, and made them more truly representative of England as a whole ; but the first conception of this scheme (which at first seemed to some on all sides to be so great an outrage on tradition), and the bold freedom combined with tact and prudence in carrying it into execution, must be credited to Fairbairn and those who were with him. I have rarely listened to any address more illuminative and inspiring than the first sermon (as I think it was), delivered by Dr. Dale in the Chapel of Mansfield College during the inauguration ceremonies, when he stated the plans and hopes of those who were making the new College, and claimed as their inheritance all the achievements of all the heroes in the history of the Church, all their writings, all their sufferings, all their excellence, their endurance and their example.

The late Principal more than once spoke to me of the sympathy and friendly intercourse with various people in Oxford, which had been a help to him in his earlier years there ; and he mentioned especially one great scholar, whose courtesy and kindly feeling had often aided him, but whose name I do not write, as he fortunately still lives and works in the University.

Full of hard work and varied activity as was Fairbairn's life, he always retained the liveliest interest in the Scottish Universities, as well as in the life of his own nation. While I do not mean that he regretted his rejection in Aberdeen, or would have sought to change his lot, if the opportunity to live his life anew had been granted to him by some fairy godmother, yet the memory of that unsuccessful candidature always lived in his mind. He observed with keenest interest the course of change through which the Scottish Universities were passing in his time ; he knew how much

this meant for the Scottish nation ; and sometimes, as he spoke about the situation, one could see that for the moment he would have loved to take part in the struggle for progress. One serious cause of weakness in the Universities of Scotland has lain in the fact that so few of the Professors worked for an ideal of a University as a whole ; almost every one, with very rare exceptions, in my branch of University life—I cannot speak of the Medical or other Faculties—has fought for his own subject, and has argued about every proposal according to the degree in which his own class would (as he thought) gain or lose, without seeking to judge from the standpoint of the efficiency of the University as a whole or of its influence on the life of the nation. The weakness of the reform party in the Scottish Universities lay partly in wrong or defective ideals of what a University ought to be, and partly in the want of leaders possessing the qualities required, such as unwearied attention to business, unflinching readiness to attend meetings, dexterity and tact in making the best of his opportunities, ability to use dexterously the forms and customs of business committees for the attainment of his purposes, in addition to the higher qualities of a true and noble ideal in education and an unflinching determination to realise that ideal.

Fairbairn must have known from his own career, that he would have been a great power in his own country and its Universities, though he never actually said to me anything that would savour of arrogance or self-assertiveness ; but he has said that he would have liked to do something in the remoulding of them, and the memory came back to his mind and his lips of those who deluded him with fair words and the promise of support. The Principal took a kindly view of that event, and recognised that it had all worked for his own good, and yet the memory remained, and the disappointment that for his own land he had done less in a direct way

than he would have liked to do. Yet he continued always to be a power in Scotland ; and in Aberdeen especially the memory of him is still fresh, and his name was an influence throughout his life.

W. M. RAMSAY.

PRINCIPAL A. M. FAIRBAIRN.

ON July 9, 1908, Lord Morley was installed as Chancellor of the University of Manchester. Among those whom he had selected as recipients of Honorary Degrees Dr. Fairbairn was included. The Senate decided that the Degree most appropriate for him was that of Doctor of Divinity, and since I was the Dean of the Faculty of Theology it fell to my lot to present my dear and honoured master. I had to condense in the briefest space my estimate of the man and his work, and I venture to quote what I said, since it may form a kind of text for this article, and make up to some extent for certain omissions in it.

“ It is with singular pleasure that I present for the first degree of Doctor of Divinity conferred in this University my former teacher and colleague Dr. Fairbairn. His services to theological science time would fail barely to enumerate. With a profound belief in the trustworthiness of reason and the rationality of history, it has been the main passion of his life to understand and interpret religion. Intimately acquainted with the comparative study of the various forms it has assumed and with the course of philosophical speculation, he has risen from the mass of intricate detail to large and luminous generalisations in the philosophy of religion. An alien in no part of the dominion ruled by the queen of sciences, he has been especially distinguished as an exponent of historical and constructive theology. Himself a preacher whose sermons have been characterised by solidity